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WASHINGTON HAILS ANDROPOV APPEAL FOR WARMER TIES

U.S. IS A 'READY PARTNER'

State Dept. Says It's Serious About Following Up Soviet Remarks to Harriman

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 3—The State Department today welcomed an appeal from Yuri V. Andropov for improved relations and asserted that if Moscow was ready "to take concrete steps" it would "find a ready partner" in the Reagan Administration.

"For our part, the U.S. approach to relations with the Soviet Union is serious and seeks to explore realistic ways of cooperation to mutual advantage," Alan D. Romberg, a State Department spokesman, said. "Our diplomatic dialogue with the Soviet Union on all outstanding issues is intensive and comprehensive, and will continue."

On Thursday Mr. Andropov, talking with W. Averell Harriman, a former United States Ambassador to Moscow and a longtime specialist on Soviet affairs, said the Soviet leadership was "ready and interested in seeking joint initiatives" that would improve relations with Washington.

A Shift From Polemics

The public exchange marks a shift away from the sharp polemics between Moscow and Washington in recent weeks. It came as senior Reagan Administration officials, told by Western allies that the new Soviet leadership was interested in a top-level meeting, were privately discussing the prospects and conditions for a possible meeting between President Reagan and Mr. Andropov.

But such a meeting would have to bypass the current stalemate in arms negotiations. The talks have been deadlocked throughout the Reagan Administration.

Some of the President's close advisers reportedly favor a summit meeting that would deal with issues of less controversy to "break the ice."

"A Crucial Watershed"

Other Presidential advisers have argued that holding a summit meeting with a limited agenda would be neither wise nor possible. These advisers, officials said, want to see how Moscow responds to shifts in the Administration's strategic arms proposals, some of which are due for approval by the President next week and presentation to Soviet negotiators soon after.

The Soviet response could be a crucial watershed, some White House officials said. "We will wait to see if they give us a propaganda blast. But if the Soviets are signaling a positive response to what they see already and will hear from us, there's the possibility of an opening."

Tensions between Washington and Moscow have built up particularly sharply since the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979.

In addition, the Reagan Administration, protesting the Soviet-encouraged repression of the independent union Solidarity in Poland, sought to impose an embargo on equipment for the Soviet natural gas pipeline to Western Europe. The Kremlin accused the White House of waging "economic warfare."

President Reagan and Mr. Andropov have also clashed several times this spring over the Soviet arsenal of SS-20 medium-range missiles targeted against Western Europe, and Western plans to deploy American Pershing 2 and cruise missiles late this year. Other continuing disputes have flared over Central America, Angola and human rights issues.

Mr. Reagan, who has said that he would accept a summit meeting if it could be properly prepared to insure concrete results, predicted Tuesday that there would be an improvement in Soviet-American relations despite sharp "rhetoric." But he gave no explanation for making that forecast at a time when many specialists said Soviet-American relations were unusually strained.

Privately, however, officials said the State Department was exploring with Moscow the possibilities of a new cul-

tural agreement and a joint move to open new consulates in Kiev and New York, and the Agriculture Department was reopening long-term grain negotiations with Moscow.

High-ranking Administration officials disclosed, moreover, that some Presidential advisers, such as James A. Baker 3d, the White House chief of staff, and Michael K. Deaver, the deputy chief of staff, have privately advocated a Reagan-Andropov summit meeting next spring.

Their approach would be to seek agreements on issues like grain trade, cultural exchanges and consulates, but to sidestep the difficult issue of arms control over which the two Governments have been deadlocked throughout the Reagan Administration.

A Major Motivation

Officials said a major motivation would be to help President Reagan in a campaign for re-election by easing international tension. A drop in tension would forestall criticism, as one official put it, that the President was "too much of a cold warrior to sit down with the Russians" and unable to reach agreements with Moscow.

Other top officials, such as Defense Secretary Casper W. Weinberger; William P. Clark, the President's national security adviser; William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, and Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, the chief United States delegate to the United Nations, were reported to be resisting this approach.

The Weinberger-Clark-Casey group was generally said by high officials to be contending that the public would inevitably expect President Reagan and Mr. Andropov to deal with arms control issues and therefore would be sharply disappointed if a summit meeting did not yield some positive results in this area.

These officials were said to fear that, no matter how much advance effort was made to lower expectations, a political backlash might develop in the United States and Western Europe if a summit meeting did not produce agreement or substantial visible progress on arms issues.

For that reason, officials said, Mr. Clark and others regard the forthcoming round of strategic arms talks in Geneva as a particularly important test of Soviet intentions on the ground that President Reagan is planning to alter the Administration's strategic arms proposal in ways that will move it closer to Soviet proposals.

In addition, Mr. Clark is understood to be looking for some Soviet restraint in Central America to improve the climate for a Reagan-Andropov summit meeting.

He has told others that he was particularly disturbed at Moscow's delivery of five shiploads of Soviet military equipment at Nicaraguan ports in the last 10 days.